

»IN VINO METAPHORA«

Nun feiern wir, vereinten Siegs gewiss,  
Das Fest der Feste:  
Freund *Zarathustra* kam,  
der Gast der Gäste,  
Nun lacht die Welt, der grause  
Vorhang riss,  
Die Hochzeit kam für Licht  
und Finsterniss.

Nietzsche

»If God is dead, everything is permitted.« To a philosopher of the nineteenth century, these words must have sounded either like the promise of liberation of the harbingers of an unthinkable catastrophe. With the advent of God's death, atheism spawned a form of nihilism which, as its most bitter critics had predicted, led to a complete lack of conviction in any moral standards. Friedrich Nietzsche, living as he did in the tumult of this death-blow, saw beyond the nihilism of the new atheism inasmuch as he perceived in it the possibility for a new breed of human being. If God is dead, Nietzsche wrote, the *Übermensch* is possible. It was this possibility of a world that might exist beyond good and evil that Nietzsche predicted and developed in most of his work. While it might, and in fact did, seem to many that atheism could only produce a moral chaos in the form of nihilism, Nietzsche's work stands as a testimony to the idea that with God's death something infinitely more noble might finally arise, shaking off the weight of a moribund Christian tradition and establishing human-kind as the standard or norm for what might now be accomplished.

For Nietzsche then, atheism did promise liberation, although not in the form of nihilism. What it might liberate was a potential inherent in human life itself which had been buried under the weight of the life-denying doctrine of Christianity. In this paper, I wish to show one of the forms liberation might take after the death of God. I shall be writing about the Dionysian and about intoxication (*der Rausch*). In »In Vino Metaphora«, I wish to affirm that God is indeed dead and that new, forbidden and irrational forms of human liberation may now release that human potential which has atrophied for two millenia under the censure of decadent Christianity and for a century under the more recent triumph of nihilism. Nietzsche assaulted not only Christianity but also those doctrines which attended its death. With atheism, as Nietzsche demonstrates, we have neither to accept nihilism nor a new transcendental. However sinful or prohibited it may seem, intoxication opens up and affirms a once dormant and human, all too human, potential in the form of an intoxicated will to power.

Nietzsche scholarship has been divided with respect to an interpretation of the will to power. On the one hand, philosophers have understood Nietzsche

as espousing a metaphysical or ontological monism or dualism and, on the other, as being a nihilist. The first position has been maintained by Walter Kaufmann<sup>1</sup> and Jean Granier,<sup>2</sup> to name only two, and the second by Arthur C. Danto.<sup>3</sup> While I cannot argue away the inconsistencies in Nietzsche's presentation of the will to power, I shall adopt Sarah Kofman's interpretation as outlined in *Nietzsche et la Métaphore*.<sup>4</sup> Although in most of the above-mentioned work, the will to power is seen as Nietzsche's central doctrine, the question of its interpretation does plague most exegetes. One is forced, then, to choose between this plurality of readings. In this paper, it is Kofman's interpretation of the will to power that will serve as a guide.

In her work, Sarah Kofman argues that metaphysics and ontology are derivative of Nietzsche's will to power understood as a psychological and physiological phenomenon. To quote Kofman:

... one cannot say that Nietzschean psychology is ... an ontological method for research (Granier, p. 17) since, on the contrary, it is the »essence« of being which is constituted by the psychology of each being. In Nietzsche's work, one cannot separate ontology and psychology. Yet it is ontology that is subordinated to psychology ... and not the other way around.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, my view is simply that Nietzsche rejected, and succeeded in rejecting, an ontological conception of the human person in terms of the will to power. There are many who would contest this point and they are welcome to do so. Nietzsche did repudiate a systematic philosophy à la Hegel, but there are some passages in his work that would support the ontologisation of the will to power. Nevertheless, Nietzsche himself stated that all ontological and metaphysical concepts are derived from a more fundamental, but empirical, source. This source is not, for Nietzsche, something that lies beyond the body, the senses or life in its more concrete aspects. It is indeed found in the psychology and physiology of every human experience.

»Reason« is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The »apparent« world is the only one: the »true« world is merely added by a lie.<sup>6</sup>

Nietzsche is quite explicit in his rejection of metaphysics and ontology. Both are, for Nietzsche, derivations of more original metaphors engendered by the senses. In the above passage from the *Twilight of the Idols*, where he discusses the genesis of the idea of the so-called »true world«, Nietzsche demonstrates how this idea has become as invalid as the notion of the apparent world. Both ideas derive from the body and the senses as motivated

<sup>1</sup> Walter Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, 4th ed., Princeton University Press, Princeton 1974. See especially pp. 235–246.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Granier: *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la Philosophie de Nietzsche*, Seuil, Paris 1966, quoted in: Sarah Kofman: *Nietzsche et la Métaphore*; see below.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur C. Danto: *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, The MacMillan Company, New York 1965. See especially pp. 80–81.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Kofman: *Nietzsche et la Métaphore*, Payot, Paris 1972. See especially pp. 175–187.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche: *Twilight of the Idols*, in: *The Portable Nietzsche* (translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann), Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth 1968, pp. 480–81.

by the will to power, that is, from a psychology and physiology which are more fundamental and yet not ontologically so.

The great novelty Nietzsche discovers is that knowledge itself should be referred to life and truth to the will to truth. The Nietzschean question is not »What is the essence of truth?« but »What does the will that wills truth want?« For the will to truth is, in its turn, only a symbol and a symptom.<sup>7</sup>

The will to truth, ontology, metaphysics are derivative of the senses and the metaphors they produce. There is nothing in Nietzsche to which an ontology or metaphysics could correspond: no true world, no *Ding-an-sich*. What remains, and what ultimately defeats a nihilist atheism, is the will to power as the creative and metaphorical activity of a body whose senses invent a world from a source which cannot be made adequate to any transcendental ground.

In all of his work, Nietzsche associated the Dionysian with an intoxicated form of the will to power. Dionysus is the god of wine and of the harvest. In him, Nietzsche also sees the *Ewig-Leidende* or that suffering which lies at the heart of human existence. Dionysian rituals are re-enactments of the dismemberment (*Zerbrechung*) of that demi-god himself. Initiates to the cult of Dionysus would drink freely, then engage in dancing and singing, hoping by this means to induce Dionysus to appear to them. According to some myths, these initiates, in the frenzy of their intoxicated state, would dismember an animal or human and proceed to eat it, assimilating the pieces of their once dismembered god. The association of the god with suffering is linked to this practice of dismemberment inasmuch as the practice inflicts, not so much physical pain, but the pain which results from what must be interpreted as individuation. Dismemberment represents the process whereby the primordial unity is torn asunder by the Apollonian *principium individuationis*. Its value, then, is the re-enactment of an event that should be viewed metaphorically. Intoxication, in Dionysian festivals, represents the opposite process of disintegration — the disintegration of individuals. By means of intoxication, boundaries and distinctions imposed by values and norms are broken down. In intoxicated states, one reaches the painful realisation that such distinctions and values are empty. The resulting identification of the intoxicated Dionysian with everything that surrounds him or her is, as Nietzsche puts it, an identification with »the primal unity, its pain and contradiction.«<sup>8</sup>

*The Birth of Tragedy* is not only Nietzsche's first published book, it is also his first fully developed presentation of the Dionysian, a theme that would occupy him throughout all of his works. In this its earliest formulation, the Dionysian appears as an artistic energy which bursts »forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist.«<sup>9</sup> It is clearly a metaphysical principle; one of the two forces or drives (*Triebe*) which make it possible for there to be a world at all. As a metaphysical drive, the Dionysian is also artistic and Nietzsche himself believed that he had produced a brand of aestheticism in his first work. Human artists only tapped the more primordial

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche et la Métaphore, p. 181.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*, in: *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (translated and edited by Walter Kaufmann), The Modern Library, New York 1968, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Dionysian forces and were therefore artists only by analogy. Not only was the Dionysian an artistic and metaphysical principle, however, it was also more fundamental with respect to that other force, the Apollonian. The Dionysian was the primal mud out of which could arise the dream world of the *schönen Schein* engendered by the Apollonian drive.

The dialectising of the worlds of intoxication and dreams would not remain in Nietzsche's later work, however. He himself realised that he could not affirm the metaphysical principles existed without contradicting his own views concerning the illusory character of all ontology and metaphysics. These latter were produced by what Nietzsche called the Socratic tendency, or the drive towards systematisation and rationalisation: the will to truth. Dionysian intoxication became one form — a more integral one — of intoxication; the Apollonian dream world would have its own brand of intoxication. Intoxication was also no longer specifically associated with drinking. It could be found in sexual excitement, »all great cravings, all strong affects; the frenzy of feasts, contests, feasts of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the frenzy of cruelty; the frenzy in destruction; the frenzy under certain meteorological influences, as for example the frenzy of spring; or under the influence of narcotics; and finally the frenzy of will, the frenzy of an overcharged and swollen will.«.<sup>10</sup> In addition, both Apollonian and Dionysian intoxication became modalities of an essentially protean will to power in its more creative and noble aspects. Yet, while the will to power could take any one of a number of forms, the Dionysian still remained one of the more life-affirming and artistic of these.

As a modality of the will to power in one of its healthier aspects, the Dionysian shares characteristics with the Apollonian and other nobler modalities. In the first place, it too is creative of the illusions, in the form of metaphors, which give life its meaning and value. Intoxication, as the disintegration of norms and values, is creative of an identification with everything that exists such that a unifying bond is established between all existents; the *principium individuationis* breaks down. This unity is no longer a primal one in any metaphysically significant sense; it is the unity of all forms of existence and is also an illusion. The second and more important characteristic of the nobler forms of the will to power is just this life-affirming trait of Dionysian intoxication. As in *The Birth of Tragedy*, intoxication allows one to affirm those irrational and painful aspects of life through reconciliation. This reconciliation is productive of a text or a rhetoric in the form of musical — in the widest sense of that word — metaphors that may excite the entire physiological system of the intoxicated Dionysian. The Dionysian says yes to a life in which it discovers suffering — the motivation, if not the force behind much value-creating activity. S/he realises in the experience of intoxication the arbitrariness of all values, norms, customs and habits and exemplifies this understanding in a music of discord and dissonance. While the Dionysian and intoxicated will to power is destructive, this destructive behaviour becomes creative in the sense that it obliges one to recognise illusion as illusion and to affirm the irrationality of life. There is no good reason, as the Dionysian experience shows, for accepting one illusion over another and, in the disintegration of all illusion, the Dionysian produces its own — a rhetoric of the body and the senses in the form of music.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 518.

One may, if one wishes a more contemporary example of this rhetoric of music, think of rock music. The parallels between listening to rock and intoxicated states have certainly been noted by many of its aficionados and critics. One writer, remarking on Walter Benjamin's discussion of intoxication (*der Rausch*) has said: Rock music »renders the bodies of its adepts completely mobile and emancipates them from what is regular and periodical. It appears to give pleasure in the adaptation of one's heart-beat to the beat of the musical motor.<sup>11</sup> Walter Benjamin saw the effects of intoxication in much the same way as Nietzsche. In both, intoxication takes the form of a disintegration of the self and of all kinds of values and norms. This disintegration or dismemberment is often effected by certain kinds of music — itself an intoxicant — and results in the emancipation of the body and the senses so that these become overtaken by the rhythm of the music. In Nietzsche especially, the association of intoxication and music — either as an intoxicant itself or as one of its effects — is a strong one.

Nietzsche describes the intoxicated will to power in both psychological and physiological terms. He is Baudelaire's doctor-philosopher who has made a forceful study of wine, a kind of double psychology. This study follows upon Nietzsche's view of the will to power as a psychological and physiological force. In Dionysian intoxicated states: »the whole affective system is excited and enhanced: so that it discharges all its means of expression at once and drives forth simultaneously the power of representation, imitation, transfiguration, transformation, and every kind of mimicking and acting«.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, intoxication takes total possession of the body in dancing and singing, the representation of animals or humans, producing a tremendous synergy — and apotheosis of the physical and psychological. It is also no accident that the music of this totalising and synergic intoxicated state should be part of a ritual such as a Dionysian festival or a rock concert. These occasions provide an opportunity for a communal experience of celebration and transformation which only heightens their effects and succeeds in removing them from the common and everyday. The power of such communal experience should not be underestimated either artistically or politically.

I have already mentioned that the psychological effect of Dionysian intoxication serves to break down all kinds of norms and values. There are interesting analogies here between Benjamin's and Nietzsche's views. The *Zerbrechung* of Nietzsche's intoxication also exemplifies its primary effect in Benjamin's work. In the latter, however, disintegration has explicitly political implications I should like to explore further. Once the individual has been dismembered *qua* individual, one is able to see its origins in its value for instrumental reason. The *Lockerung des Ich* is a means to breaking down and cognising the bourgeois aura of individuation. Further, the intoxicated individual also sees through the aura of things, the history of their value in relation to capitalism. The everyday and historically conditioned connection between man and man, man and him or herself and man and things is thus called into question. The values of instrumental reason disintegrate and the possibility of salvation, of a life without pathos, can be glimpsed through the mortified aura of these values.

<sup>11</sup> Norbert Bolz: »Illumination der Drogenszene« in *Walter Benjamin: Profane Erleuchtung und Rettende Kritik* (edited by Norbert Bolz and Richard Faber), Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg 1982, p. 236.

<sup>12</sup> *Twilight*, p. 519.

For Benjamin, however, intoxication could only have a political significance if it were dialectically linked to profane illumination in relation to which it was only a *Vorschule*.

Benjamin transforms the archetypal image of the Dionysian destruction of the *principium individuationis* into a dialectical one: the dialectical tearing to pieces of the individual into creature and class subject. As a creature, one hopes for redemption, as a class subject, one is committed to revolutionary action.<sup>13</sup>

It would be interesting, however, to analyse the form of communality established in Dionysian rituals — whether ancient or contemporary. While Nietzsche and Benjamin neglect to study this aspect of intoxication, concentrating solely on the individual's solitary experience of intoxication, their ideas concerning the effects of intoxication would appear to sanction an analysis of it as an instance of a kind of primitive solidarity. The breaking down of ties, bonds, habits, customs, norms and values — perhaps nowhere better seen in its Dionysian splendor than at Woodstock — creates a sense of shared experience which could be precursor to institutionalised forms of political and revolutionary action. Certainly the more vocal detractors of the rock music experience all share this fear to a certain extent. Peace and love as voiced by the hippies on L. S. D. 25 still hold some promise and continue to engage, if only marginally, all those of us who may have gone on to become life insurance salespeople. That governments and individuals in ancient Greece and more contemporary times have expressed concern over everything from the length of the hair of the initiates to the lyrics of their music certainly speaks for the political aspect of the experience of intoxication be it through music or drugs.

In terms of its artistic significance in Nietzsche's work, intoxication was divested of some of its artistic value as Nietzsche continued to reassess the Dionysian force or drive. Intoxication, in either its Dionysian or Apollonian forms, becomes one, among other, artistic and intoxicated activities. This newer conception of the Dionysian artist accords well with Nietzsche's more developed views of the will to power as protean. Indeed, it would appear that the Dionysian in art can be surpassed and this by means of »the great act of will, the will that moves mountains, the frenzy of the great will which aspires to art.«<sup>14</sup> This greater will is that which produces architecture — the highest artistic expression of the will to power. However, in those passages where the Dionysian and the Apollonian lose some of their value with respect to artistic activity, it is not clear that Nietzsche means to deprecate Dionysian music. He seems rather to want to enhance another aspect of the intoxicated Dionysian. Music and the Dionysian continue to be closely linked in the idea of the Dionysian artist and yet the Dionysian may take yet another form. This later form, while not incompatible with its artistic one, makes Dionysus more than simply a vehicle for music.

The new conception of the Dionysian associates it with scepticism and the playful, mocking behaviour of an illusion-producing demi-god who knows itself to be illusion-producing. Dionysus grows in wisdom and appears in

<sup>13</sup> »Illumination der Drogenszene«, p. 237.

<sup>14</sup> *Twilight*, p. 520.

*Beyond Good and Evil* in the mask of a philosopher and Nietzsche's teacher. In the tearing down of values and norms — the activity of the destructive Dionysian — in the unmasking of illusion and the mask of illusion Nietzsche discovers his protophilosopher. He appears there as Silenus, Dionysus' teacher, a figure which may also be found in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The rhetoric of nihilism is indeed overcome in the disintegration of our human, all too human, illusions and in the affirmation of life in its illusion-generating forms of the will to power. The Emperor knows that he wears no clothes and yet feels no shame. Dionysus is reduced in the end to a mask which, and importantly so, knows itself to be one. Nihilism is defeated, not by attempting to find a new transcendental ground for values, but in the generation of a plurality of grounds, metaphors and illusions. The important thing is not to deny nihilism but to push it to its limits. As Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

... whoever has really, with an Asiatic and supra-Asiatic eye, looked into, down into the most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking — beyond good and evil and no longer, like the Buddha and Schopenhauer, under the spell and delusion of morality — may just thereby, without really meaning to do so, have opened his eyes to the opposite ideal: the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with what is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo* — not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle but at the bottom who needs precisely this spectacle — and who makes it necessary because he needs himself and makes himself necessary.<sup>15</sup>

The dreadful abyss of noon, the great noon of which Zarathustra spoke is indeed just this approach of the paradoxical silenus — Dionysian. If he is destructive, barbaric and anarchic, it is only because, as Dionysian, he must shatter the old tablets and sound out the old gods with a tuning fork until the source of all values has been discovered. Dionysus, though a mask himself, also makes possible the stripping away of all masks. In Dionysian intoxication, the source of all value-creating activity is laid bare and without shame. Nihilism, pushed to its limits, is just this discovery, the approach of the great noontide of a human life which needs only itself to create values and meanings. Beyond nihilism lies the laughter, dance and song of Dionysus — the god of wine, fertility and life itself.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, in: *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, loc. cit., p. 258.